to say, then I will be on my way to the Embassy."

"I am hoping that what I have to say will convince you that you need not go to the Embassy," Signor Vecchio replied. "But of course, my dear young lady, it is entirely up to you." He made a gesture with his hands which was very explicit. At the same time, Luella was sure she should go at once and not listen to him.

"I am going to give the order for the coffee," he said, "and if you do not need it, then of course, you may leave it. It is black, delicious, and very sweet, as you are yourself."

Luella was again frightened. She did not know exactly why she was frightened, but she was. Then as Signor Vecchio moved towards the door it opened with a bang.

"*Trovato – Trovato!*" a voice cried speaking Italian, and a man came into the room. He was wearing a black cassock. When Luella looked at him, she realised he was the priest she had seen in the chapel after the wedding – the priest who had hurried away when the servers had appeared, pushing them out of his way as he went. As he came into the room she thought he looked a rather rough man. He did not give an impression of holiness she would have expected of a priest.

"*Guarda! No siamo solo!*" Signor Vecchio said sharply.

The priest stopped in his tracks. "My apologies," he muttered. "I thought you would be alone."

Signor Vecchio turned to Luella. "Will you excuse

me, Signorina, but I must have a word with Father Sebastian. He will not keep me long, but I have something to show him in another room." Without waiting for Luella to reply, he pushed the priest out of the door. Looking back he said over his shoulder: "I shall not be more than two or three minutes." Then he was gone.

Luella glanced at the closed door. It seemed odd that the priest she had watched in the chapel should be here. However it somehow reassured her that she need not be afraid of Signor Vecchio.

She could quite understand why for the moment she had wanted to run away. It was because she had talked to a stranger. That was something her mother and father had never permitted. And yet, if the priest was here, then surely nothing could be wrong.

But he had burst into the room! She wondered why he was so excited at what he said he had found.

Because she was alone, she could now look round the room without appearing inquisitive. She looked at the pictures more closely and there was no doubt they were strange. All of them were of women who had been painted in what were certainly unusual postures.

Then she told herself that she was not at this moment interested in pictures, but in what Signor Vecchio had to offer her. If she did not agree she could be on her way to the British Embassy.

She began to feel sure that any employment the Signor suggested would be something of which neither her father nor her mother would approve. She wondered if because she was young and pretty he